R

Translation of Dr. Sylvia Bermann's letter

AL 197A

Embassy to Mexico & Buenos Aires & Jim Bumpus & Derian

Buenos Aires, April 1977

To my friends,
To my patients,

I believe it to be my duty after these many months of withdrawal and solitude to establish contact with you, in order to explain the reasons for my abrupt disappearance and my whereabouts. But let me tell you, chronologically, what has happened.

1. Last year, on the 27 of April, my brother, Prof. Claudio Bermann, Director of the Neuropathyc Institute was arrested at his home in Cordoba without any specific charges. In July he was placed under the jurisdiction of the Executive Branch. He was held "incomunicado" in the Penitentiary of Cordoba, unable to have any visitors, until December. Then, he was transferred to the Penitentiary of Sierra Chica in Buenos Aires Province, where he is only allowed visits by his closets family members. Until today his name has not appeared in any of the lists of detainees published by the Government.

2. Last May (1976) I was dismissed as Head of the Psychopathological Division of the Policlinic Finochietto, after having served for twenty years in that hospital. I was also dismissed from my teaching positions in the Medical School and in the Public Health School of Buenos Aires.

3. In July (1976) two close friends and colleagues were kidnapped, Drs. Raul H. Fuentes and Juan Carlos Risau. The latter held the office of Secretary of the Argentine Federation of Psychiatrists. In my position as President of the Federation at that time I led the national and international protest. We still have not heard any information about their whereabouts.

4. At 6 p.m. on Saturday the 13th of November (1976), while I was away in the city of Cordoba, fifteen individuals in civilian dress with bullet-proof vests and carrying machine guns and pistols broke into my home and consulting office, bringing with them my daughter Irene whom they have already detained. There they barbarously tortured my daughter, asking about the whereabouts of her husband. The servants, two women, were also horribly beaten, and raped with guns being introduced into their vaginas; plastic bags were used to induce asphyxia. At 9 p.m. ten individuals of the same group broke into the residence at Cangallo 1671, 13 A, once again with my daughter Irene, who once again was beaten. My youngest daughter's boy friend, Damian Alfredo Soto was also beaten, and then they were both taken away. Furthermore, from my residence they took every valuable object, they also took my car, which I have not recovered. Since then, despite numerous and intense inquiries I still do not know what happened to my daughter Irene and to the young man Soto. I have asked some of the highest authorities and their answer has always been absolute silence.

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
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Besides all this, there is the general situation of the country: the oppression on the level of culture, education and press; the knowledge of the existence of thousands of disappearances similar to that of my daughter; the systematic use of horrible tortures, and the infamous treatment of prisoners.

In the field of health this means a growing deterioration of the hospitals, the impossibility for people to pay for medicines and medical assistance. In the specific field of mental health, the good public services that existed have been destroyed, specialists have been arrested and there exists a general campaign against psychology and psychiatry which are presented as dangerous instruments of subversion.

Meanwhile, knowing that I am also searched for, I have had to go from home to home, hosted by very dear and generous friends, busy basically in takink care of my little grandson, who has been so abruptly separated from his mother, and I have lived completely apart from professional and scientific activity.

This narrative does not attempt to dramatize a very difficult year, nor does it attempt to justify the decision I have made to leave the country, but it is in itself an important precedent and a small sample of how human rights are considered in today's Argentina.

A return to my usual activities is difficult. I would have to hide, as I have done until now, and this will not be easy in the long run. And what kind of professional and scientific life could I lead? Furthermore, any kind of civic or professional activity would be limited by the same reasons. Even though I have always thought that my duty was to remain in my country - and I have tried the impossible to do so - I do not see any other alternative but to leave. It is possible in other lands to continue the task of defending human rights and developing a professional and scientific career - the latter I regard as inseparable from the former.

As I take my leave from you, I wish to everybody health and happiness in a free Argentina.

Dr. Sylvia Bermann